

# Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

Winter 2012, Issue 215

Annual Newsletter

Good late winter (almost Spring) to all,

It is Annual Report time again, and I take this chance to mail everyone – regular subscribers and non-subscribers – a look back at 2011.

One of our usual topics is weather. If I had written this a month earlier, I would have bet on winter trying to average itself out. But, we have experienced a winter to remember, for good reasons, for a change.

On to the annual report!

As usual, this past year found the Greenville Local History Group still using its usual pattern of meetings – a mix of programs and share sessions. Our programs featured a look at Boarding Houses (a listing, website); an introduction to Mary Todd Lincoln (a joint meeting with the Civil War Round Table); a nostalgic look at Walter Ingalls' 1947 cross-country trip with his parents; and finishing with a presentation of the 2012 calendar and then a quick look at all 250 photos from the first seventeen calendars.

In between were a whole raft of share stuff, ranging from the news and stories and clippings, as well as photos and artifacts and local accounts from you share-session-attendees and from a number of sources encountered along my travels. Major articles or notes included: Tucker Lewis' Eagle Scout Project (refurbishing the historical markers); a few pages from the early 1900s Presbyterian Church Cookbook; Richard's updates on the Potter Hollow Schoolhouse project; Mary

Shaw's showing of antique household machinery; Evie Simpson's memories of Greenville; copies of pages from a Guide Book – The Greene County Catskills, from about the 1930s; talk of Hurricane Irene; and a partial transcript of Lillian Weeks' memories of Result.

Of course, there are the numerous small topics that regular subscribers to this newsletter are alerted to.

One highlight, of course, is any year's production of the Local History Group Calendar. The 2012 production is our 18th calendar, and I always think it was worthwhile doing, especially after it is done. This year, Deb gave me a pep talk in early summer to get the thing done, something I had started the previous winter. Maybe it's age, but I found this one to be taxing; there's the selling of it that needs to be done, and we haven't had a break-even year in a long time, although this year came closer than most.

So, I think 2013 will be an off year, with plans to make 2014 our next calendar. The only picture I am committed to so far is the Freehold Mill picture from Don Howard. Some time during this year, we can take a look at likely candidates for calendar photos.

The boarding house project has loomed large in my local history work. A link to my website ([dteator.com](http://dteator.com)) and then to (Greenville Boarding Houses) will show a page listing all the "resorts" I can find evidence for; almost all have a separate link off that page, some of them developing some details, some of them with boilerplate info. If you have info for any of them,

feel free to pass it along. I'll be spending more time at one of our programs.

One hope is that the long stretch of winter has allowed for some work on local history projects to be shared during the coming year, and there are many ways to contribute. One useful way is to preserve some piece of Greenville's history. This may happen by the saving of an artifact or knick-knack; however, the part that is tougher to save is the collection of memories and stories. And thus, I urge you to audiotape or write your memories of Greenville people, events, and places. Daunting at first, this recording becomes more and more useful with the continual adding of sources. And, whatever method you choose to share our local history, it is appreciated here.

Our membership numbers about 70, with about 55 receiving the newsletter (I also include the Town Board), and the attendance at meetings this past year averaged a consistent fifteen-ish (except for September to November). Our schedule will continue to be the second Monday of April through November.

Looking ahead, I still can use help in scheduling programs. The program director (me, by default) for the GLHG will welcome ideas for programs, for it is the programs that tie together our share sessions. If you have an idea, please let me know.

Attendance, as previously noted, averages in the 10-15 range, which, for me, is enough to bounce ideas around. However, September and October saw low attendance; even though I am willing to go ahead with any size group, it seems more fruitful with our usual range. Both of those months were share session evenings, and perhaps that is a key. Or, perhaps not. You will have to let me know.

One idea would be to change from every other month to every third meeting for a share session, which is fine with me. But, that means more programs. I will have to

ponder more but feel free to pass along your input and ideas.

A note about subscriptions. Your address label has your subscription expiration date. (No date means the subscription is expired.) Anyone wanting to receive the newsletter can subscribe for \$10 for a year (usually April – November issues, plus the annual) and mailed to **Don Teator, 3979 Rt 67, Freehold NY 12431**. Checks should be made out to: **Don Teator**. Multiple years will be accepted. (The fee is to cover expenses of the mailing; I always consider people not getting the mailing to be members if you have ever expressed an interest in Greenville Local History, and I define that quite freely!)

Also, if your address label needs changing, let me know. In addition to my address, I can be reached at 518-634-2397, and, for the computer literate, I can be emailed at [dteator@gmail.com](mailto:dteator@gmail.com).

I hope to see you at the April 9th share session (2nd Monday of April; 7:30 pm). Come with reports of what you've been working on, or ideas that someone else might be able to use.

One more note: The Civil War Round Table's March meeting (Wednesday, the 14th) is hosting Matt George who portrays the life that a Civil War Soldier in the 134th NY. He comes in uniform and brings the equipment that a soldier would use in fighting.

OK, one more note. I have copied Ron Gabriele's article in the Daily Mail about the Vanderbilt Theater – it's a keeper. (And, subscribers to the Pioneer saw a lengthy article about the 1935 Glenn murder, a topic we have covered in a couple of our programs.)

Until then, take care.



Remember When...

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# The Vanderbilt Theatre

By Ron Gabriele

For Hudson-Catskill Newspapers

Late last winter while we were printing the article on the Cocksackie Theatre, we postulated that the Cocksackie Theatre could well have been the most forgotten movie theatre in Greene County. We missed that one by a country mile.

While interviewing William and Linda Van Vechten early this past summer for the Leeds Drive-in article, they kindly presented me with two Leeds Drive-in movie card posters. Knowing how much I enjoyed western movies, they made sure that both cards were chock full of western features. Then they presented me with a third movie card poster. This card was entitled, "Vanderbilt Theatre Greenville". My immediate reaction was, "Whoa what is this?" Linda replied, "That was an indoor theatre in Greenville and Bill was a projectionist there for a period of time."

My wife Arlene and I are movie buffs, so when I got home I asked her if she had ever heard of this movie theatre. No, she had not ever heard of it either. So, Cocksackie Theatre may well not have been the most forgotten movie theatre in the county.

The building that later became the Vanderbilt Theatre started life as a church in East Greenville, apparently near the Pine Lake Manor resort. Some years ago, Carol Schreiber wrote a college term paper on the Vanderbilt Theatre and we quote from her story.

"The church was built in 1827 in East Greenville and when the congregation fell on hard times the building was sold to Dr. Gideon

Botsford for the sum of \$7,610.00. It was dismantled and moved into Greenville on Rt. 81 next to the building that later would become Mary's Diner. Mr. William Vanderbilt purchased the building and had it erected on the property that he owned along Rt. 81.

The building became an opera house for the pleasure of his private guests.

In addition, the building hosted: High school graduations, amateur theatricals, traveling stock companies, square dances and basketball games. The dimensions were too small for a basketball court and sometimes the crowd became unwilling participants in the game.

Silent movies were first shown at the Vanderbilt Theatre in 1920s. The building had many uses at that time and so the seats for the movies were folding chairs. If the movie was particularly thrilling people would jump up in their seats overturning chairs which added to the excitement of the moment.

Mr. Cornelius Baumann of Greenville related that a Mr. Bame from Hudson would come to Greenville on Friday evenings bringing the movie to be shown that night and people anxiously awaited his arrival. One cold, snowy winter night he did not arrive. Due to ice on the Hudson River the ferry was not running to Athens that night, so Mr. Bame decided to drive over to Athens on the ice, which was an accepted practice in those days. However, the ice was too thin to support his automobile and both the car and the film plunged into the depths of the Hudson River.

Happily, Mr. Bame and his companion survived.

The Vanderbilt family continued to show movies from the 1930s to the 1950s. The theatre was modernized and a large new sound system was installed in 1954. In earlier years they advertised the movie theatre as "ice cooled" which meant that fans were blown over a block of ice. This had a cooling effect, but also made the theatre very humid. Viewers left the movies cool, but wet."

Air conditioning was finally installed in the late 1940s or the early 1950s.

On Saturday afternoons double features were shown. The program included cartoons and serials. Curt Cunningham recalls watching Republic's famous serial, "King of the Rocket men" in the late 1940s. Pie eating contests for the youngsters were a regular part of the program. After the double feature ended they would play the first movie over again and Mr. Cunningham remembers long lines of people stretching all the way back to the Pioneer Insurance Co. building (now the town hall) waiting to get into the second show.

Admission was 35 cents, soda was 10 cents and a box of popcorn was 15 cents. Elsie Rowe sold tickets and Morris Wolfort collected tickets and sold pop-

corn and soda. Mr. Wolfort always wore a blue striped suit. Both individuals served in those roles for many years.

The Cunningham Funeral Home is located across the street from the site of the old theatre and over the years many people would call the funeral home and ask what was playing at the movies. Mr. Charles Kiley

worked at the funeral home for over 30 years and when no one was at the funeral home telephone calls would be call-forwarded to his house a half-mile away. Many times he would receive calls wanting to know what was playing at the Vanderbilt. When he said he did not know, the caller would indignantly state, "Well stick your head out the window and look!" He would then have to explain the situation.

Jackpot drawings were held at the Vanderbilt for sums as large as \$80.00, which was larger than the average weekly salary in those days. The theatre used the famous carbon-arcs in the movie projectors. The Vanderbilt did show 3-D features during the 3-D craze of the early 1950s. The theatre exhibited a wide variety of feature films of all genres over the years. Always there were plenty of western films. It would be difficult to overstate how popular western movies were for the American public starting in the 1920s and going into the late 1950s. In fact one of the last movies shown at the Vanderbilt was, "How The West Was Won" released by MGM on November 7, 1962. Shortly after that the Vanderbilt ceased being a movie theatre and became a playhouse for summer stock until about 1968.

In a little-known fact, Robert Way reopened the Vanderbilt as a movie theatre for about 3 to 4 months in the winter of 1969-1970. After that a new owner took it over and ran it as a movie theatre for 2 to 3 more months. Following the short run the old building would never again be the home for motion pictures.

In the early 1970s Bill and Hildy Meagan opened a NAPA store in the old structure. This lasted until 1981 when the NAPA store moved over to Main Street. The building would sit for about four more years and become run-down. Lou



Photos contributed

Above, The exterior of the Vanderbilt Theatre. The location is now home to the Cumberland Farms in Greenville. Below, what appears to be a dress rehearsal at the Vanderbilt Theatre.



Spinelli owned both the old Vanderbilt building and Mary's Diner and he had the old theatre torn down. Curt Cunningham recalls that a cable was tied around the structure and pulled down by a bulldozer in about an hour.

Today, the site of the Vanderbilt Theatre and Mary's Diner is occupied

by a modern Cumberland Farms Service Station and Convenience Mart.

While researching the history of the Vanderbilt Theatre we were able to determine that there may well have been even more forgotten movie theatres in Greene County than the Cocksackie Theatre or the Vanderbilt Theatre, but

then that is another story .

(Special thanks to: Don Teator, Curt Cunningham, Carol Schreiber, John Bensen, David Elsbree, George Story, Mark Wilcox, David Dorpfeld, Giovanna Sheridan, William and Linda Van Vechten and one un-named woman.)